

ART. X.—*Case of Cancer of the Stomach.* By ISAAC G. PORTER, M. D.,
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THE following case of organic disease is interesting, chiefly for its bearings on diagnosis. The rapidity of its course, after the appearance of alarming symptoms, and the comparative absence of certain pathological phenomena, which are ordinarily prominent in such cases, while they did not conceal its organic nature, or its specific name, were yet sufficient to cause strong doubts on the subject, in the minds of many. An outline of the autopsy having been requested by the sons of the deceased, a copy of it is forwarded for publication, with an account of the symptoms as they existed, under the belief that, though an isolated observation, and though tending rather to obscure, than elucidate diagnosis, it may at least lead to a guarded prognosis in similar cases.

The case occurred in the person of a gentleman, sixty-six years of age, of much energy of character, and of successful enterprise. His health may be said to have been robust, until within two months of his death, though for twelve or fifteen years he had been affected with what he supposed to be a mild form of dyspepsia, and which he traced to a severe burn, received when a youth, on the parietes of the stomach and abdomen. Its usual form was regurgitation of food, yet free from acidity. There were also, at a later stage, eructations of large quantities of air, which was often fetid. Slight uneasiness after a full meal also existed, with a constant sense of weight or oppression, yet never amounting to actual pain. Two months before his death, he applied to Dr. N. S. Perkins of this city, his usual medical attendant, (and in connection with whom, the writer saw the patient,) on account of slight constipation, and somewhat increased dyspeptic affections. The former soon yielded to mild remedial means, but the latter gradually increased, until he found that solid food caused considerable distress, but ordinarily not until it had been six hours in the stomach.

Dec. 19th, 1847, he vomited matters for the first time, resembling coffee-grounds, and the passages from the bowels were of similar appearance and colour. Still his physical strength so far remained, that although somewhat emaciated, from the influence of low diet, and the want of solid food, he was able to be in his counting-house, Jan. 3, 1848, nineteen days before his death.

From this time, he declined rapidly. January 14, he threw off from the stomach a large quantity of uncoagulated blood, mixed with coffee-grounds, and from that time, this symptom was often repeated until faintness at times was induced. The relief previously gained from vomiting had been conspicuous; matters occasionally were thrown off, which he recognized as having been received into the stomach, some days previously, and at such times, he would feel that the mystery was solved, and that the cause of the disease had been reached.

The pain, mean time, was so trifling, as scarcely to deserve the name. As he approached the close of life, an indefinable distress existed in the region of the stomach, which he described as a sense of sinking, and

emptiness, rather than actual pain—and more the faintness which comes from want of food than the sensation of hunger. Pressure over the epigastric region produced scarcely any uneasiness, and there was *none* of the lancinating pain so generally believed to accompany cancer. A small tumour, it was thought, could be detected by external examination near the seat of the pylorus, or rather of the duodenum. It *may* have been the latter, as the post-mortem examination revealed this intestine filled with hard fecal masses, though the existence of this circumstance ought probably to be referred to inverted action of the intestinal canal induced in the last stages, by the almost constant regurgitation or vomiting which existed. He died January 22d, 1848, in the full possession of his mental faculties, with the calmness of the philosopher, and the moral grandeur of the Christian.

Autopsy, thirty-six hours after death.—Body considerably emaciated, though in making the abdominal section, fat one-third of an inch in thickness was found. The countenance did not possess the “dingy, sallow, exsanguinous, yet opaque appearance, so common in cancerous diseases.” The peritoneum was much thickened in the neighbourhood of the stomach, and the latter had contracted numerous adhesions to surrounding organs. It was found contracted; but the nature of the disease was apparent before it was opened—a scirrhus tumour, the size of half a small orange, being evident on manual examination. The disease was concentrated at the pylorus, though the adjoining portions of the stomach were somewhat hypertrophied. The pylorus constituted a scirrhus stricture, it being occupied by a carcinomatous deposit of the encephaloid species, half an inch in thickness, and which latterly must have prevented all downward egress from the stomach. Superficial ulceration had occurred in some places, but it was mainly hard, like cartilage, and in its colour and appearance brain-like. The duodenum was filled with hard, fecal masses, about the size of hickory-nuts. The under surface of the liver presented a carcinomatous deposit, the size of a grape-shot.

The treatment in the foregoing case was mainly palliative, the medical attendant early discovering the injury resulting from active measures. Gentle alkaline aperients, and lime water and soda were evidently serviceable in quieting the stomach. Narcotics were scarcely once used, so little indication existed for anodynes.

The points of practical interest are:

1st. The rapidity of its course (but little more than a month), after the appearance of grave symptoms.

2d. The absence of the peculiar countenance belonging to the cancerous cachexia, and the length of time (six hours) which elapsed, after solid food was taken, before it produced decided uneasiness.

3d. The absence of positive pain, even in the last stages, especially of the lancinating kind, peculiarly characteristic of cancer. The last days and hours of life were, to a considerable extent, passed in quiet tranquil sleep.